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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Dangerous Addiction

Except on the fringes of opinion, no informed American any longer doubts that Soviet-supplied armies are using "yellow rain" in Southeast Asia, nor that the gases contain toxins outlawed by the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention. Yet the U.S. government has yet to file formal charges that the Soviets and their proxies have violated the treaty. Instead, President Ronald Reagan will tour Europe next week stressing his willingness to reach new arms agreements with the Soviets.

The American government's efforts, of course, have been crucial in exposing "yellow rain." It has sponsored both the collection of refugee interviews and the laboratory analysis that has identified mycotoxins derived from mold. Honest young officials bravely faced the evidence, and Secretary of State Haig was willing to go

The real reason our government has not followed the 1972 procedures is simply that they are too noisy. The preoccupation of the Reagan foreign policy, and of his pending trip to Europe, has been to persuade our European allies that Ronald Reagan is not a reckless cowboy, and the principal ploy has been lofty rhetoric about the great hope of arms control. A Security Council debate, ending in a Soviet veto, with the Europeans actually forced to choose sides, would disrupt the image-making. So it will be surprising if "yellow rain" is even mentioned in Mr. Reagan's four European speeches. Some aides are urging him to make a new proposal in each of them for new agreements with the same Soviets who callously shattered the Biological Weapons Convention.

Whither Arms Control? — III

An Editorial Series

out on a limb in his initial announcement in Berlin. Even the Carter administration compiled the refugee accounts dutifully, if quietly. There is much in the record to commend.

Yet the 1972 convention explicitly provides the procedures to follow in case of a violation. A complaint may be filed with the UN Security Council. An emergency conference of the signatories may be called by petition of a majority of them. These steps have not been implemented, even by the Reagan administration. No complaint has been filed with the Security Council, and no effort has been made toward a petition for an emergency conference.

As always, there are sophisticated excuses. While the Soviet Union is the only remotely plausible source of the mycotoxins, the powerful circumstantial evidence is not capped by a smoking gun. Some of the evidence comes from intelligence sources our government is reluctant to reveal. An investigation was asked not from the Secu-

"After Detection—What?" was the title of a brilliant Foreign Affairs article, written 21 years ago by Fred Charles Ikle, who today is under secretary of defense for policy. He observed, "A potential violator of an arms-control agreement will not be deterred simply by the risk that his action may be discovered. What will deter him will be the fear that what he gains from the violation will be outweighed by the loss he may suffer from the victim's reaction to it."

"Democratic governments might experience serious political difficulties in reacting effectively to a detected evasion," Mr. Ikle predicted. "If evidence of the violation is equivocal or based on secret intelligence, the government may be reluctant to acknowledge the evasion or feel unsure of its ability to convince public opinion. For example, an admission that the control agreement had failed might be exploited at home by the political opposition."

"The injured government must be willing to increase military expenditures and to offend pacifist feelings," he added. "Public opinion may not approve, especially if the evasion occurred gradually." The injured government "may have embarked on

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